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ABSTRACT

In attempting to assess the effects of humor on vocabulary instruction, an intervention strategy was implemented which sought to compare the results of such instruction with those produced from vocabulary instruction delivered in a traditional, non-humorous vein. To this end, the intervention proceeded thus: an experimental group of seventh-grade students was the recipient of a series of lessons for vocabulary words for which humorous contexts were provided. By contrast, a series of vocabulary lessons, for the same words, was concurrently delivered to a control group in which the contexts given were typical of those found in a standard textbook. Following each lesson, identical assessment tests were administered to each group. An examination of test scores revealed that those students in the experimental group scored significantly higher than did their control group counterparts. (Contains 33 references. Appendixes contain vocabulary reviews and tests.) (Author/RS)

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The Use of Humor In Vocabulary Instruction

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Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Maser of Arts Degrees In
Reading Specialization
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ABSTRACT

In attempting to assess the effects of humor on vocabulary instruction, an intervention strategy was implemented which sought to compare the results of such instruction with those produced from vocabulary instruction delivered in a traditional, non-humorous vein. To this end, the intervention proceeded thus: an experimental group of students was the recipient of a series of lessons for vocabulary words for which humorous contexts were provided. By contrast, a series of vocabulary lessons, for the same words, was concurrently delivered to a control group in which the contexts given were typical of those found in a standard textbook. Following each lesson, identical assessment tests were administered to each group. An examination of test scores revealed that those students in the experimental group scored significantly higher than did their control group counterparts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The instruction of vocabulary is critical in literacy education. A student's association with words is an elemental block in the foundation of his learning, for it enlarges his word bank, thus increasing his ability to effectively communicate with others. Moreover, the depth and breadth of one's word knowledge help sharpen his communication skills, so that he may render his messages with clarity, precision, and eloquence. As educators, it is our responsibility to our students and to ourselves to look closely at the process of vocabulary instruction. The means by which we impart word knowledge should not only ensure sound understanding of vocabulary, but should inspire a curiosity about words, for such curiosity, once implanted in the mind of a child, will engender a lifelong association with the basic tool of communication, our vocabulary. The importance of vocabulary instruction and the consideration of words is made more compelling when one understands that, ultimately, it is the skill with which we use our words that draws our listeners closer and leads them to consider the messages we have to impart. It is surprising, then, to learn that there has been a dearth of inquiry into effective vocabulary instruction over the past thirty years, and that only recently have educators begun to re-examine methodology and theory into this realm (Blachowicz and Fisher, 2000). A consideration of such studies that are available to us, however, does yield some insight into current practice and the theory that informs it.

In considering the concept of vocabulary instruction, educators have focused on the ways by which children acquire word meaning. Factors that contribute to the growth of a child's bank of words have been examined, as well as the question of why some children enter school with a larger bank than do others. Studies reveal to us that children who are raised in a word-rich environment are most likely to show advanced vocabulary development (Blachowicz and Fisher,

2000). A child's broad and varied exposure to language, both orally and in print, has been found to correlate highly to increased aptitude in literacy skills (Smith, 1997). When a child is exposed to words via the printed page, there is direct as well as incidental learning of literacy skills that occurs. First, children who engage in frequent leisure time reading are likely to encounter unfamiliar words, and to either look up their definition in a dictionary, ask someone else their meaning, or use context clues to gain a sense of the word. The benefits derived by the child in any one of these endeavors are multiple in nature and broad in scope. The route a child takes in arriving at the meaning of an unfamiliar word is as important as the end result which is, of course, that he has made a deposit into his vocabulary bank. He may, for instance, have conversed with an adult and been given different perspectives on the word in question. He may, rather, have exercised his thinking by figuring out the word's meaning by looking at its context and sorting through different possibilities in his mind. Or he may simply, in consulting a dictionary, have sharpened his study skills. Children, then, who by virtue of their prior experience with words arrive in the classroom with expanded word banks, by extension bring with them advanced ancillary skills as well. Moreover, children who acquire a curiosity about words soon recognize commonality in features, linking them to certain word families, hence providing them with clues about their meaning. Once a child begins to do this, he sees the emergence of patterns within the tapestry of our language that confer a certain order upon the meaning of words. As this knowledge heightens, so too does the ease and comfort with which a student uses his vocabulary. Additionally, he gains the sense that the words have become "his own" (Blachowicz and Fisher, 2000). The task before us as educators, then, is to endeavor to ensure that our students recognize the importance of enlarging their vocabulary and gain an appreciation of, and curiosity about words. With this comes the task of imbuing our students

with a sense of not only how, but why we choose the words that we do in our efforts to communicate effectively with each other. This is especially important, for with this awareness comes an appreciation of words in and of themselves. In attempting to help educators attain these goals, researchers have looked at the process of vocabulary instruction, providing some insight into how children acquire word meaning. What follows is a brief look at some of the recommendations that have been made in this realm, as well as a consideration of some piftalls to guard against in our efforts to provide effective vocabulary instruction in the classroom.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT ACQUISITION OF VOCABULARY

In examining the question of effective vocabulary instruction, virtually all research begins with a consideration of direct and indirect vocabulary instruction (Smith, 1997). With regard to the former approach, instructors target a list of words prior to the start of a unit or a body of reading that the students will complete. These words then become the subject of a lesson, delivered by the teacher, in the classroom. Words are shown to the student and meanings are provided, along with opportunities for the students to practice using the words that they have learned. This kind of instruction, if effectively delivered, is thought to offer considerable benefits in the arena of vocabulary instruction (Rupley, 1999).

Indirect instruction, on the other hand, involves students' incidental learning of vocabulary via their exposure to words in their home and classroom environment (Blachowicz and Fisher, 2000). When a student is immersed in an environment that values language and the use of it, the likelihood that he will enrich his vocabulary is heightened (Nagy and Scott, 2000). As has been noted by Blachowicz and Fisher in their work, "Vocabulary Instruction:"

> Incidental word learning, through listening or reading, will always be part of students' general vocabulary development. Although the extent and nature of their learning are debated, the fact that it occurs is undisputed and the importance of a word-rich environment has been often demonstrated...studies, with varying contexts and ages of learners all confirm that environments where language and word use are celebrated and noted encourage vocabulary learning. (pp. 507)

Studies seem to inform us, moreover, that vocabulary instruction in the classroom is most effective when both direct and indirect instruction techniques are used, and when students are directly involved in constructing meaning in a variety of contexts (Smith, 1999). A thorough approach to vocabulary instruction, it seems is one that supplements direct instruction with a variety of printed materials and that provides students ample time to read them (Davis and McDaniel, 1998). Despite the informal nature of incidental word learning, its execution in the classroom is not without some design on behalf of the teacher. When an instructor consciously uses new and varied vocabulary in his lectures, he may then indirectly provide meanings of such words in several different ways. One method is to provide definition by antonym. That is, an instructor may use an unfamiliar word within the body of his discourse to his students, then contrast it to ideas couched in terms that the students know: "Diane was vivacious, unlike her dull friend, Ethel. " Another possibility, within the same approach, would be definition by

example: "Charlie was a ne'er-do-well. He was constantly being fired. In the past year he's had five different jobs." Yet another might be definition by association, where an unfamiliar experience or known occurrence: "He ate as ravenously as a bear just awakened from a winter's sleep.

The incidental learning of words, such as occurs through independent reading, allows for a greater number of words to be filtered through a student's perception, therefore accounting for a larger volume of words being learned through direct instruction (Smith, 1997). That this is so, however, should not preclude teachers from considering reading as a vehicle to provide vocabulary instruction, for while direct instruction ensures depth of learning, indirect exposure to words through wide and varied reading certainly promotes breadth of sword learning. Moreover, one might consider that indirect vocabulary instruction through reading may well be more efficient than that achieved through direct instruction. There are a number of reasons that this may be so. To begin with, as instructors we do not always, when we assess material to be covered, target the words that will give our students the most difficulty. Often, a teacher will deem as worthy of instruction words that the students already know (Blachowicz and Fisher, 2000). Conversely, unfamiliar words, or those more likely to pose a problem for the student, will at times be overlooked. Furthermore, studies show that an independent reader will isolate his own words, irrespective of preparatory vocabulary lessons, while he reads. He will also investigate the meaning of a word when he considers it to be critical in understanding the meaning of the passage in which he finds it (Blachowicz and Fisher, 2000). Additionally, studies have revealed that word meaning for students increases when they themselves choose which words to study (Blachowicz and Fisher, 2000). Upon consideration of these points, one might conclude that although indirect vocabulary acquisition through reading may not be as structured,

formal, or quantifiable as that which occurs in direct instruction, its value cannot be understated. Students' independent reading not only provides them with some autonomy with respect to the learning of new words, but increases the likelihood that the most unfamiliar words will be learned. Further, it affords students an opportunity to feel more personally invested in their learning, which, in the view of many in the field of educational research, is essential in effective instruction of any kind (Davis, 1998). Having briefly looked at some of the aspects of indirect instruction and the kinds of methods used in its effective transmission in the classroom, let us now look more closely at direct vocabulary instruction as a means for imparting word meaning to students. Studies that have sought to shed light upon the teaching of words have largely dealt with questions of direct instruction, and it is within this realm that the following discussions lie.

DICTIONARY-BASED VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION

In the realm of direct instruction, i.e., that in which students are formally taught the meanings of words in the classroom, several effective approaches, distilled from recent years of research, have emerged. In attempting to improve upon the methods of direct instruction, educators have examined the characteristics of traditional, pre-Seventies vocabulary instruction, and considered its shortcomings. We have looked anew at approaches such as the traditional dictionary definition/memorization method. Here, students are provided with a set of words, directed to consult a dictionary, use the word in a sentence, and commit it to memory. Ultimately and unfortunately, however, the memory bank into which the word is deposited is short-term, for apparently words "learned" in this way are retained only until some follow-up assessment (i.e. quiz, test) has been administered. Subsequently, more often than not it appears, the student releases his grasp, which most likely was tenuous to begin with, on the meaning of the word (Nagy and Scott, 2000). Depending upon a dictionary, and, more importantly, a

student's interpretation of the definitions contained therein has, in the light of recent studies, proven to be a faulty approach (Nagy and Scott, 2000). First, having students rely on dictionary definitions to process meaning is ineffectual when one considers the possibility (indeed, the likelihood) that a verbatim dictionary definition would not transfer smoothly to the word. Additionally, dictionary definitions are often couched in terminology that is itself vague to the student. This may engender not only confusion about the word in question, but frustration regarding the use of reference sources to gain information and certainly there is the possibility that it would imbue the student with a distaste for the entire process of learning vocabulary.

Another pitfall in the use of dictionary definitions to promote vocabulary has been revealed in a study conducted by Miller and Gildea (1987). These researchers were concerned with the utility and practicality of straight dictionary definitions. Specifically, they looked at the usefulness of dictionary definitions in enabling a student to reliably transfer the definition provided to a new and appropriate context. They felt that the information provided in standard dictionary definitions was presented in such a way that the learner could easily misinterpret it. They believed that a student, armed with only a dictionary definition to try to process the meaning of a word for which he lacks a fundamental understanding, could go astray. They hypothesized that such a student could, in all likelihood, attend only to that part of the definition that he could understand and hence be left with an inaccurate, or at best incomplete sense of the word (Nagy and Scott, 1997). The study by Miller and Gildea was animated by their doubts about the effectiveness of having a student generate his own sentences for unfamiliar words, based on the information gleaned from a standard dictionary. Their findings, in part, showed that

> ...the predominance of curious sentences reflecting misconceptions about the meanings of words (e.g. My family erodes a lot) led Miller and Gildea to conclude that the exercise of asking students to write a sentence from the definition of a new vocabulary word is pedagogically useless. Miller and Gildea hypothesized that the creation of unacceptable sentences for definitions is the result of a simplistic substitution strategy; students find a familiar word or phrase in the definition of a new word, create a sentence using that word or phrase, and then substitute the new word in its place. Thus, the sentence My family erodes a lot was presumably generated when a student found eat out or eat away in the definition of erode. (pp.2 – 3)

In examining errors of this kind, in which a student uses a fragment of the definition without regard to role of the fragment within the overall structure of the definition, the researchers coin the term, "fragment selection error." To test their hypothesis, they composed their own definitions for a set of nonsense words. In addition they provided clear, unambiguous example sentences to help clarify the meanings. The definitions were constructed in such a way that one could easily fall into the trap of committing a "fragment selection error." They chose as their

experimental student population members of the fourth and sixth-grades of an elementary school. The students were instructed to read the definitions, look at the example sentences, and compose their own sentences for each word. Their study revealed that, even though the students were given examples of correct word usage via a sample sentence, they committed errors of fragment selection fifty percent of the time (Nagy and Scott, 1988).

Having established some failings in traditional vocabulary instruction such as rote-memorization and dictionary-based lessons, some researchers have devoted their studies to alternate and effective means of direct vocabulary instruction. An agreed upon tenet of meaningful instruction, borne of studies in the field, is that students need to be actively and personally involved in the acquisition of new words (Nagy and Scott, 2000). A negative aspect of traditional vocabulary instruction is that it renders the student an inactive participant, that is, it fails to invest the child with a sense that he has made the word "his own." In order for a child to feel engaged and a part of the process of learning a new word, consideration must be given to metacognitive theory. This theory holds that a child must make connections between new information and prior knowledge, and that learning is reinforced when a student can apply what he knows to new situations (Pressley, 2000). Appropriately, then, consideration has been given to methods of vocabulary instruction that would enable the student, as an active participant, to activate schema in constructing meanings of unfamiliar words.

SCAFFOLDING

How might a student be allowed to draw from past experiences to formulate a personal impression of the meaning of an unfamiliar word? In attempting to construct a framework of meaning within the mind of a student, educators employ something called "scaffolding." Simply put, this involves the gathering of words, concepts, and ideas, familiar to the student, which he

may then associate with the unfamiliar word. In doing so, the student erects within his mind a structure, or scaffold, which he can then build upon to construct a body of meaning for the word in question. To do this, studies show, educators may employ a number of techniques, such as "webbing," "semantic mapping and associations," and "word matrices," all of which are variations of the same idea and which operate on the same theory. They all plumb students' personal experience in having them build impressions of unfamiliar words, which are used as building blocks in the creation of usable definitions. Each method begins with the teacher introducing a new word. Next, the teacher provides examples of the word, using familiar terms and expressions in doing so. He then calls upon the students to brainstorm and generate supplemental information related to the word (Smith, 1997). Let's say, for example, that the target word was "adder." The instructor may begin by presenting to his students an easily recognizable word such as "reptile." From this starting point, students may then brainstorm a list of words and ideas, eventually hitting upon "snake," from which the discussion could proceed to "venomous snake," and the impressions that such a concept evokes within the minds of the students. In this way, students pool their knowledge of pertinent vocabulary, drawing on personal experience ('...oh yeah, my big brother used to have a pet snake,' or 'I once visited a snake farm and saw a man milk the venom from a rattlesnake...') as they discuss the unfamiliar vocabulary word. When they have finished this activity, students have formulated an impression of the word in question, not from a definition in a book, but from consensus and experience, and have thus put their own stamp on the meaning of the word.

In semantic mapping, the notion of brainstorming a list of related terms takes on a somewhat more structured form in that, as the students are generating words, the teacher groups them into categories on the board. This provides for the students a visual "map." In this way,

the groupings of the words becomes clear as classroom discussion emerges. The concept of vocabulary matrix carries this a step further still, in that the teacher not only categorizes the terms generated by the students in a visual graphic, but draws pertinent relationships among them as well. With such a visual representation of the inter-relatedness of the words on the map, a matrix is established and the definition of the target word is, for most students, enriched (Smith, 1997). Additionally, allowing kids to visualize multiple relationships, as they emerge through class discussion, aids in developing within them a sense of the semantic context of the word, constructing for them a deeper picture of the meaning (Smith, 1997).

Another approach to effective vocabulary instruction is that which examines word components and how they affect meaning. Research tells us that often, when a student encounters an unfamiliar word whose context proves insufficient in enabling him to formulate a sensible definition of the word, he may examine the word itself to determine meaning. The word, should it contain a recognizable root or familiar affix (i.e., the structural features of the word), may well in itself yield some insight into its meaning. Hence, research suggests that effective vocabulary instruction attend to this facet of word recognition (Nagy and Scott, 2000).

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

How do we inspire a curiosity about words and instill within our students a sense of the intrinsic value of the pursuit of word meaning? In short, how do we get children to wonder about words? In order to help lead a child along this path, research informs us, attention should be given to word components, or "morphemes." A student's awareness of word parts and how they contribute to meaning is referred to as "morphological knowledge" (Nagy and Scott, 2000). To illustrate how morphological awareness strategies, combined with scaffolding techniques, may be utilized in the classroom, consider the following example. Suppose students were to

encounter the word "retrospect" in their oral reading in class. The teacher, rather than providing the meaning for the students and then moving on, might stop, write the word on the board, and have the students look closely at it. Might they recognize a familiar root? If not, the teacher may highlight the 'spect' part of the word and ask the kids what other words, containing this word part, come to mind. This activates prior knowledge and may generate responses such as "spectator," "spectacular," "inspect," and "spectacle," all of which are then written on the board. From this point, discussion would naturally proceed to a consideration of the commonality of meaning among these words. Once it has been determined that all of these words have something to do with eyesight, or looking, the instructor would once again tap into the students' schema by asking them what the 'retro' style of clothing refers to. Students, especially if they are of high school age, would readily recognize this and offer their own definitions of the term. Again, definitions, as the students generate them, are written on the board. Students would then see phrases such as "back there," "back in another time," or "back in the past," and recognize what links them together. In working through the definition of a word in this way, students can not only visualize its meaning as it emerges, but are able to see, and make sense of the fact that the parts of the word "retrospect" combine and contribute to its meaning which is, of course, "looking back." Through this kind of semantic association, teachers can tap into students' personal experience in constructing a framework of meaning. This allows students to feel a personal investment in the process of determining word meaning, and offers them an immediate and graphic representation of the word.

ANALOGIES

Another technique that has proven to be beneficial in the realm of vocabulary instruction is the use of analogies to reinforce word meaning. The use of analogies requires students to consider the relationship between words in a pair, and then among the pairs themselves. Having students think in terms of analogous relationships among words requires them to think critically about the word and to make judgments about its meaning. Research tell us that among the levels of understanding attained by a student in his mastery of vocabulary is that of the "multidimensionality" of words (Nagy and Scott, 2000). This concept, as its name would suggest, refers to the notion that many words cannot satisfactorily be assigned a single definition. Often a word will possess shades of meaning, depending upon how it is used. One may, in fact, subcategorize definitions into referential (denotative) and affective (connotative) meaning (Nagy and Scott, 2000). Meaningful vocabulary instruction should include exposing a student to the nuances of the language, with respect to subtle shifts of meanings in our words. Use of analogies may facilitate such instruction. To view an example of how this technique may be implemented, consider the following procedure. In a lesson on the connotative meanings of words, a teacher may present the class with the following pairs of words: "curious/nosy," and "slender/skinny." An ensuing discussion would likely focus on the positive and negative affectations attached to the words in each pair, though both words in the pair appear to be somewhat synonymous. Again, should the teacher endeavor to show shades of degree for words that appear to have similar denotative meanings, he may present to his students the following word pairs: "angry/furious," and "broke/shattered," and ask them to think about the analogous relationship among them. In getting them to decide what, if any, analogies can be drawn between the above pairs of words, the teacher might ask his students to consider what might get them grounded for a

longer period of time, if their parents were angry with them or furious with them. Or, he may ask them to consider what would be more painful, a broken wrist or a shattered wrist. When a teacher can provide vocabulary instruction that enables his students to recognize shades of meaning, he puts into their hands not only the tools to communicate, but also the power to do so with style.

CONTEXTUALIZED AND DECONTEXTUALIZED LANGUAGE

In an effort to expose students to new vocabulary, so the researchers tell us, consideration must be given to "contextualized," as opposed to "decontextualized," language, and how each impacts learning (Nagy and Scott, 2000). The difference in the two types of language is, essentially, in the mode of transmission of words. The former type of language refers to oral discourse. Oral communication does, by its nature, provide clues to the meanings of unfamiliar words. When the transmission of language is conversational, it is affected and hence facilitated by intonation, gestures, and facial expression. Moreover, words transmitted in this way are usually steeped in shared experience. Therefore a student may more readily grasp the meaning of a new word presented to him in a contextualized fashion than he would in the latter mode. Decontextualized language involves words transmitted to the student via the printed page. There is no shared conversational context upon which the student may rely to help him determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word. When words are introduced to the student in this latter way, they are stripped of any affectation that may cue the student regarding their meaning. Thus, an understanding of both kinds of language, and an awareness of the differing demands placed on the student in comprehending new vocabulary contained in each, is another essential ingredient in the execution of effective vocabulary instruction in the classroom.

ASSESSMENT

An important facet of vocabulary instruction deals with assessment. As has been seen with methods of instruction, innovation, unconventionality, and diversity render assessment more meaningful to the student. Recalling the mechanics of pre-Seventies vocabulary instruction, assessment usually came in the form of the teacher calling for students to provide the word, either orally or in writing, and follow it with a definition (usually verbatim from the dictionary). An occasional break from the routine came in the form of requiring the students to use the word in a sentence. As is the case with any kind of instruction, assessment that is bereft of imagination can dampen any enthusiasm that kids may bring to the task at hand. Since test-taking, for most students, is attended by a certain degree of unpleasantness to begin with, instructors should consider assessment techniques with regard to vocabulary instruction carefully. When considering kinds of assessment for the teaching of vocabulary, one should endeavor to inject not only imagination, but variety as well (Blachowicz and Fisher, 2000). Presenting kids with different kinds of vocabulary tests is important for two reasons. First, variation of test format helps to maintain interest level. When the routine in one's classroom becomes predictable, boredom tends to set in. Hence it is essential, it would seem, to exert any means necessary to vary procedure whenever possible. Another and perhaps more important consideration is the fact that different children excel at different types of tasks. One student might perform well in a close-type format, for example, while someone else's area of skill may be in finding word antonyms. In varying the kinds of assessment that he uses, then, the instructor increases the likelihood that he will provide the kinds of tasks that complement the various kinds of learning styles that exist among the children in his classroom, and can more effectively meet the needs of his students.

VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION AND COMPUTERS

So far this review has examined vocabulary instruction in terms of theoretical underpinnings as well as methodology. The research discussed has pertained to an examination of vocabulary instruction from the early Seventies, when educators first looked at this field anew, to current techniques and practice. A view of vocabulary instruction as it moves into the Twenty-first Century and beyond will now be provided by delving into computer-assisted vocabulary instruction in the classroom. Electronic devices can greatly enhance a student's awareness of not only a meaning of unfamiliar words, but pronunciation as well. The work of Reinking and Richman seem to validate this (Miller, 1997). They designed an experiment whereby sixth-graders read texts with difficult words on a computer screen. Those who were able to receive on-line assistance with the key words significantly outperformed their peers on a reading comprehension passage containing the targeted words (Miller, 1997). With regard to pronunciation, programs are now available for use in the classroom, which allow the student to "click on" to a word in the electronic text and hear the pronunciation of the word.

In addition to the kinds of computer-aided instruction made available to students through technology in the classroom, the computer offers innovative, interactive, and, ultimately, unprecedented means of delivery of new vocabulary to students. A glimpse of such instruction, and a hint of the untapped potential for vocabulary instruction in the future, is provided by Erik Blankenship (1997) in his discussion of the use of computer technology in the classroom. He discusses "text adventures," which utilize a video-game format to create something which, on the surface, appears to be nothing more than a survival challenge with computer graphics. Yet it is, of course, a unique vehicle for vocabulary instruction. Such a program taps into a student's video-game savvy, while at the same time providing incidental yet extensive practice in using

context clues to determine word meaning, and utilization and retention of new vocabulary. The concept of text adventures refers to just that—an adventure in which the student becomes actively involved while operating a computer—not unlike a video game. In this adventure, however, the student is exposed to unfamiliar vocabulary whose meanings he must determine, through context, in order to advance the adventure along to a favorable outcome. In this activity the student is actively and emotionally invested in determining word meaning, for it may mean the difference between being defeated by the evil adversary, or conquering him and emerging victorious. The student is given a set of instructions to follow, each of which contains a new word. By figuring out the word, and, more importantly, how to use it, the student enables himself to move on to the next stage of the adventure. This approach seems to be not only grounded in sound academic theory on vocabulary instruction (maintaining that when a student has a vested interest in the knowledge and correct usage of a word, he retains it), but provides an added benefit as well. All the while that the child thinks he's engaged in a simple, entertaining diversion (in short, something fun), he's learning. Some might argue that this is the best kind of instruction.

HUMOR

A study by Moran in 1996 examined the positive effects of humor in general terms. This study sought to examine the role of humor in both the reduction of stress and in one's ability to reinterpret a situation or event. For if humor was found to have an impact in these realms, its benefits could be viewed as being twofold: as a psychological boost, and as a tool that may be useful in reframing an aversive or tense situation. Moran's study looked at a sampling of college health science students. The subjects in the study viewed three separate videos, each representing a different theme (humor, hope, and sorrow). After viewing the videos, subjects'

anxiety was measured via administration of a 21-point subjective units of disturbance scale (SUDS). Levels of depression were similarly measured using a state depression analogue of the SUDS. Additionally, subjects completed a questionnaire, whose purpose was to measure sense of humor in terms of how often an individual thinks he or she smiles in a variety of scenarios. Results indicated that although there were no significant correlations between subjects' scores on the humor questionnaires and their ratings on the anxiety scales, such scales did decrease significantly after exposure to a humor stimulus (Moran, 1996).

Another example of the value of humor was addressed by Goldman and Wong in their consideration of the relationship between students' stress and self-esteem. They examined a body of work that supports the idea that a student's perception of the various facets of his person is a direct correlate of the level of stress he experiences in his daily pursuits. Indicators such as self-confidence, self-importance, seeing oneself as being above-average, being energetic, being reliable, viewing oneself as intelligent, and gender have all been examined with respect to the stress levels generated therefrom. In pursuing this idea further, the authors used a sampling of college students and administered a battery of tests designed to measure self-esteem and stress. Subjects were asked to complete a Self-Perception Profile for College Students (Neeman and Hatter, 1986). For this profile, eight subsets were drawn, including "finding humor in one's life." A Global Measure of Perceived Stress (Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein, 1983) was then administered. Results showed that amongst the areas highlighted in the profile, students scored high in that relating to humor. Moreover, the ANOVA for the ability to find humor in one's life showed a significant main effect for stress (Goldman and Wong, 1996).

That humor can help alleviate stress, and may aid an individual in coping with his external world, seems to be borne out in the aforementioned studies. Moreover, in the field of

career counseling, the use of a sense of humor has been advocated in dealing with serious problems counselors may confront (Nevo, 1986). Is such a view, i.e., one that suggests the benefits derived from humor, compelling though it may seem, grounded in sound medical study? This appears to be the case. Lee Berk, D.P.H. in psychoneuroimmunology, tells us that "laughter diminishes stress and pain and can increase antibodies that help fight disease and combat anxiety (Clarke, 2002)." In addition, he points out that "mirthful laughter has a spiritual connotation, and we know that it can change and lower heart rate, lower blood pressure, and decrease stress hormones (Clarke, 2002)."

Another study that sought to plumb the psychological and physiological effects of humor on learning was conducted by Ronald A. Berk. He examined the injection of humor, in various controlled ways, into tests administered to undergraduate and graduate students of a statistics course over a six-year period. Berk's examination in this realm appears to support the position that humor in testing proved beneficial not only from a psychological standpoint, but in a physiological regard as well. In terms of the former, the injection of humor was found to reduce anxiety, stress, and tension. With regard to the latter, a significant by-product of humor was observed. An activity that is colored by humor produces laughter of some form, be it a smirk, smile, giggle, or outright laughter. This stimulates a physiological response that decreases stress hormones such as serum cortisol, dupac, and epinephrine, as well as growth hormones in the blood (Berk, 2000). In addition, Berk's studies inform that the use of humor can have certain drawbacks; namely, that inappropriate use may be offensive or distracting, especially to students, like those in his graduate classes, whose attitudes and approach to their studies are of a more serious nature. Overall, however, his findings strongly endorse the use of humor as an effective tool of instruction and as a means to reduce anxiety and improve performance.

The establishment of humor as a viable component in human interaction renders it a noteworthy approach in the classroom. When one considers that humor-related behavior exceeds all other types of emotional behaviors combined (Keith and Spiegel, 1969), he must recognize that the injection of humor in the classroom utilizes an approach with which the students are abundantly comfortable and familiar. Specifically, the use of humor by a teacher can help establish a positive classroom environment and an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. First, humor helps imbue a student with a feeling of control, in that when a teacher shows his humorous side, it helps minimize the differences between teacher and student and engenders within him a sense of kinship with the teacher (Pollack and Freda, 1997). Kinship is further strengthened when a teacher shows his students that he can laugh at himself. Consequently, humor has been found to be an effective means by which a teacher can establish rapport with his students. In a similar vein, timely and strategic use of humor can be an effective way to defuse an angry or hostile student (Quina, 1989). The use of humor can, moreover, promote creative thinking, in that when a child is confronted with contexts for the material at hand that may be absurd or humorous in nature, he learns to see things from an altogether different perspective (Fry and Allen, 1997). A humorous touch in the classroom may also be instrumental in helping motivate an otherwise reluctant learner. Such students often lose any inhibitions they may bring to the learning process when material is presented in such a way that their attendant stress is alleviated (Pollack and Freda, 1997). A final, but no less important virtue of the use of humor in the classroom is that it can help enhance a child's self-esteem. A teacher who models self-deprecating humor for his students teaches them the value in taking oneself lightly. This helps diminish students' reluctance to take risks in their academic endeavors for fear of exposing themselves to embarrassment amongst their peers. In light of the information gleaned from such

studies as those discussed, it would appear that the use of humor, especially in a middle school setting, would be a worthwhile strategy in the execution of vocabulary instruction.

PRESENT STUDY

In light of the above information, the subject for the proposed study was the following: How would the injection of humor into standard classroom vocabulary lessons affect students' performance? Furthermore, to what degree would such a change be evident? The hypothesis of the proposed study was this: Humor-laced vocabulary instruction would have a positive and significant impact on students' learning of vocabulary. Further, the achievement of students, measured in their ability to recognize and understand selected vocabulary via a written exam, would show that those who undergo humor-tinged vocabulary instruction outperform those who do not.

METHOD

Participants: The participants in the study consisted of the following: 39 boys and 46 girls aged twelve, distributed among four seventh-grade reading classes. The school in which the study was conducted is located in Fords, New Jersey. The ethnic mix of the participants broke down as follows: fifty percent white, thirty percent black and Hispanic, fifteen percent middle eastern, and five percent Asian. The socio-economic makeup of the sample ranged from middle- to lower-middle class. The students were grouped according to their classes (i.e., each class comprised a single group, four groups in all).

Materials: The materials that were used were those stipulated by the curriculum guide for the seventh-grade Developmental Language Skills program at Fords Middle School. The program in use was the Heath Middle-Level Reading Program. Vocabulary lessons proceeded on a weekly basis, as is the norm for the program, with assessment tasks given to the students after each unit.

The four classes were divided thus: In two classes students received vocabulary instruction as is recommended in the teacher's guide. This was the control group. The other two classes, the experimental group, received humor-enhanced instruction.

Procedure: How was humor employed in the presentation and instruction of new vocabulary to those students in the experimental group? Upon completion of each lesson, these students were given a vocabulary study guide in which each word was couched in a humorous context. Following each passage, the definition of the word was provided. This procedure differed from that in the control group in that, although these latter students likewise received a review sheet, the contexts provided on it were straightforward and serious. The children in both groups were then given the following task: Using the review sheet as a guide, compose their own contexts for each target word. Furthermore, immediately prior to administration of a follow-up vocabulary test, students were given these study guides once again and were allowed to read through them one final time, to refresh themselves with regard to meaning and usage of each word. The tests, identical copies of which were given to each group, mirrored the format of the review sheets in that they consisted of a series of passages. Additionally, the passages on the test were similar to the contexts provided the control group, i.e., they were straightforward and of a sober nature. The difference between review sheet and test, however, was that the passages on the latter were cloze-type, requiring the students to choose from among their vocabulary for completion. The assessment tests, the identical forms of which were administered to all students, were the standard test forms provided in the reading program.

Data Analysis: Data analysis consisted of achievement-type test scores attained by the students of both groups upon completion of each vocabulary unit. The proposed timeline for this venture

was two months. The study began upon the students' return from winter break in January 2002, and proceeded through the end of February.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of humor-laced instruction on the teaching of vocabulary. Further, this endeavor sought to determine whether, if indeed such an approach affected a positive impact on students' learning, such an improvement was significant. For the purposes of this experiment, then, statistical analysis of the test scores of both the experimental and control groups was undertaken. Hence, a quantitative data analysis of the mean and standard deviation of both groups was examined. Testing yielded the following results: the mean for the control group was 77.53 (SD=14.74); the mean for the experimental group was 83.19 (SD=12.51). Moreover, in using a standard t-test to analyze the data, it was determined that, with an alpha level of .05, the effect of humor on vocabulary instruction was statistically significant, $t(326)= -3.76$, $p<.01$.

DISCUSSION

This study, while having illuminated a specific approach to vocabulary instruction, shed light upon the topic in a broader sense. While the results of the study are compelling, consideration of these results must next be addressed. Why might the scores of the experimental group have been significantly higher than those of the control group? Viewing it from a purely clinical perspective, one has seen that the injection of humor into a lesson reduces stress, diminishes the distance between student and teacher, and helps create an environment in the classroom that is not only conducive to but encourages academic endeavor. Beyond this, however, viewing it in terms of practicality, the use of humor in the classroom helps make learning just plain fun. Once the "funny vocabulary lessons" became routine, the experimental

group came to anticipate and eagerly await them which, even if their test scores showed no improvement over those of the control group, would have been a significant payoff and well worth the effort. Simply stated, students in the experimental group outperformed their control group counterparts because they were, by virtue of the unique kind of instruction they received, more actively involved in each vocabulary lesson.

The results of this study, when viewed in the context of what is known about humor in instruction in general, appear to support prevailing thought (i.e., that humor can be beneficial in the classroom). A considerable ancillary benefit of using humor in the classroom, however, that was clearly evident, was the heightened enthusiasm it created within the students. More importantly, use of humor was shown to provide an additional positive impact. When a teacher reveals to his students his human side, and invites them to laugh along with him at these foibles, it cements a bond between teacher and pupil and affords the student the freedom to reveal more of himself in the classroom, which the teacher may seize upon in his pursuit of a teaching moment, which, ultimately, must be the aim of all educators.

After having planned, constructed, and executed this study, some limitations come to mind. The first and most critical of such considerations lay in the humor itself. Although it is reasonable to expect that all children possess a sense of humor, one should not assume that all children find the same things funny. Contexts for new vocabulary which, upon initial consideration were thought to be worthy of outright prolonged laughter, did in fact receive only the barest ripples of mirth, or were misunderstood by the children altogether. Conversely, contexts thought to be only mildly amusing were, in a word, arresting when the students encountered them in a lesson. One would do well, in constructing humorous contexts, to try to place himself on the level of his intended audience.

An additional drawback in this study, albeit a minor one, was that some students are, by virtue of being unaccustomed to it, simply uncomfortable in a classroom setting that is anything but serious and businesslike. In addressing this latter concern, one should bear in mind that although the diverse fabric of our student population necessitates the creation of different kinds of settings in which all students may thrive, laughter is a common thread that connects them and hence its solicitation in the classroom is a worthwhile endeavor that should not be overlooked.

CONCLUSION

The pursuit of the effective teaching of vocabulary is a noble one. What greater gift can we give to our students than the tools to enable them to communicate effectively? When we help a child amplify the depth and scope of his word bank, we deepen that resource that he will draw from to communicate with others and to impart his messages with precision, clarity, and grace. Ultimately, communication through language is the glue that bonds us together. Without it nothing else is possible. And, to a large degree, the quality of our interaction with each other is enhanced by the richness of our vocabulary. Moreover, the English language, when used deftly by one who is attentive to the nuances, subtleties, and evocative power of its words, can be breathtaking. To begin a student along the path that will someday lead him to comfort, ease, and command in his use of words is a worthwhile endeavor, and certainly deserving of our attention. The technique of creating vocabulary lessons that were laced with humor was seen to succeed on two levels. First, as evidenced by the test scores that were gleaned in this study, such an approach appeared beneficial in affecting students' short-term retention of meaning and usage of new vocabulary. Beyond this, however, it was observed that the students in the experimental group enjoyed their vocabulary lessons. There was laughter and lightness in the classroom on vocabulary day, which the children came to eagerly anticipate. It was evident that the students in

the experimental group thought that they were having fun in the classroom, without ever realizing that they were actually learning something in the process. This is the kind of education, one might argue, that is, especially for children on the middle school level, the very best kind.

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APPENDIX

Vocabulary Review (A)

Charley Trippi, a Hall-of-Fame halfback who played for the Chicago Cardinals in the 1950's, had his career ended by a vicious hit – an elbow to the jaw by another Hall-of-Famer, John Henry Johnson. These were the days before facemasks, and Trippi's jaw was broken in five places, and his nose was shattered. (nasty, savage, fierce)

The empty canoe drifted down the river, past the rocks and the rapids and under the overhanging tree limbs. It came to the crest of a waterfall, teetered for a moment on the very edge, then went over. (rocked, wavered, balanced)

The football team was clearly inferior to the team it was about to play. The players, however, were inspired by the words of their coach. The powerful, emotion-packed speech given by their head coach motivated them to go out and play beyond their abilities. Not surprisingly, they won the game. (inspired, filled with emotion)

After the rainstorm, the usually crystal-clear waters of the bay became so murky that a person swimming underwater and wearing goggles would not be able to see two feet in front of him. (cloudy, unclear)

During WW II, the allied forces made good use of amphibious landing craft when storming beaches in the Pacific and during the invasion at D-Day. These boats, which could be launched from troop carriers and could navigate deep waters, could actually drive up onto the beachheads. They were called Higgins Boats, named for the New Orleans ship-builder who developed them, and many believe they turned the tide of battle to the allies' favor. (adaptable to both land and water)

The burglar triggered the alarm while trying to slip into the rear window of the jewelry shop. In a flash, police surrounded the shop, and the would-be jewel thief was apprehended. (set off, activate)

The man took his worn-out billfold from the back pocket of his jeans, and from it plucked his last dollar bill. Then, with trembling fingers, he handed it to the clerk to buy a lottery ticket. (wallet)

As a young man, my grandfather traveled extensively through the south. He worked, for a time, on a tobacco farm in North Carolina. He picked oranges in a grove in central Florida. He managed hotels in Mississippi and Alabama, and finally he worked as a brakeman on the Georgia-Southern railroad. I'm surprised he doesn't have a southern accent. (at great length)

Vocabulary Review (B)

"For your information," said Otto to his friend Mort as the two sat dropping water balloons out a second-story window on unsuspecting passersby, "I did NOT need training wheels on my bicycle until I was 14. That's nothing but a vicious lie." (nasty, savage, fierce)

Carla was teetering on the brink of a nervous breakdown. Consequently, when Milton dressed up in a Howdy Doody costume and came leaping out at her from her bedroom closet late one evening, it pushed her right over the edge. (rocking, wavering, balancing)

"Mr. Aria is all excited about taking me on a date to one of his favorite places, the bottle cap museum in Scranton," explained Mildred Fleener to her sister Bernice. "He thinks it'll be a great time, but somehow I just can't get too motivated about looking at a bunch of old bottle caps. To me, it's about as exciting as watching paint dry. (inspired, filled with emotion)

Mr. Aria reached into the murky depths of his fiendish, evil, sinister, and diabolical mind to produce the killer homework assignment of all time. (cloudy, unclear)

Carlton looked fondly upon his younger days when he used to torment his sister, Irma. Ah, yes, there were those happy occasions when he'd put a snake into her lunch box. Nothing could top the times, however, when he'd put some amphibious animal, like a frog or a salamander, under her pillow. (adaptable to both land and water)

Mr. Aria smelled the aroma of fresh fish as he strolled past the seafood market one fine April morning, and it triggered in his mind the romantic dinner he had prepared for his beloved Mildred the previous Saturday: sardine sandwiched on rye toast with onions and spicy brown mustard. What a guy! (set off, activate)

Curtis found a billfold in the middle of the 7th grade hallway, and when he looked through it and saw that it was bulging with ladies' phone numbers, he knew that it couldn't possibly belong to Mr. Aria. (wallet)

Don't let those thick glasses fool you. Myron is quite a fascinating fellow. You'd never know it to look at him, but he is a leading expert on the history of shoelaces. He's read extensively on the subject—just about every book he owns deals with it. Got a question about shoelaces? Myron is your man. (at great length)

Vocabulary Test

Although I have traveled _____1_____ in the United States, having visited just about every single state, my favorite place to visit is still Oregon. I spent four unforgettable years at the University of Oregon in Eugene, and whenever I drive along those coast roads and smell the fragrance of the fir and cedar trees in the misty rain, it _____2_____ memories in my mind of my college days.

A single piranha fish attacked a calf standing in knee-deep water in a tropical stream. This _____3_____ a _____4_____ attack by dozens of others swimming nearby, and as the fish attacked in a violent frenzy, the shallow water became _____5_____ with blood, flesh, and fragments of bone.

Mike lost his job and, after months of being unemployed, was _____6_____ on the edge of poverty. He was about to give up all hope, when he remembered the words of his grandfather, who once told him that it's okay to get knocked down, as long as you get back up. These words helped _____7_____ him to begin a lengthy search for new employment. His _____8_____ efforts paid off and he was ultimately rewarded by acquiring a much better job than the one he had been fired from.

While most people seem to like carrying a wallet, I find this to be a bit bulky, so I prefer instead to use a _____9_____. Oh, sure, I can't carry my driver's license or credit cards around with me, but I usually just leave those in my car.

I am always _____10_____ to do well in school by the thought that if I earn good grades, I'll someday be admitted into a good college, which will enable me to one day enter the profession of my choice.

The criminal psychologist probed into the deep and _____11_____ depths of the serial killer's mind to try to determine what _____12_____ his _____13_____ attacks on his victims. After months of _____14_____ studies, however, the doctor could find no _____15_____ for the crimes.

Jill told everyone in the school that Barbara was being unfaithful to her boyfriend Tom, since she was supposedly seen at the movies with Mark. Since Tom was well-liked by just about everyone in the school, this _____16_____ an angry response among the kids, and people began saying cruel things about her behind Barbara's back. The only problem was that the story Jill told was a complete lie, and I can't understand what would _____17_____ her to start such a _____18_____ rumor about Barbara.

I've read lots of detective stories, and if there's one thing I learned about solving a crime, it's this: No matter how _____19_____ the investigation is, the one thing the detectives need to determine is a _____20_____ for the crime. Once they can discover a reason for the deed, the guilty person is not hard to find.

Answers

1. extensively
2. triggers
3. triggered
4. vicious
5. murky
6. teetering
7. motivate

8. extensive
9. billfold
10. motivated
11. murky
12. triggered
13. vicious
14. extensive
15. motive
16. triggered
17. motivate
18. vicious
19. extensive
20. motive

Vocabulary Review (A)

The final challenge for Mark in becoming an Eagle Scout was to survive a three-day hike into the heart of Round Valley State Park. Besides having to be able to trap, prepare, and cook his own food, he had to build a lean-to as a shelter and sleep under it. Luckily for him, he found a large, sturdy old oak tree, whose trunk he used as a support. (a temporary shelter)

When I owned my dog, Nunzio, I would occasionally brush his coat. Once, while doing this, I found an unusual insect that resembled a tick, on his belly. I wasn't quite sure what type of tick it was, or if in fact it even was a tick, and, fearing that it might be a Lyme's Disease-carrying pest, I put it into a little jar and brought the unidentifiable creature to my veterinarian, who was able to make a positive identification. (unknown, unable to be determined)

During the fur-trade of the early 1800's, when the beaver fur hat was popular in the big cities of the northeast and Europe, the Rocky Mountain Fur Company did a booming business. It was operated by Jedediah Smith, Danny Jackson, and Billy Sublette, who, at the peak of their careers, employed hundreds of trappers who trapped beaver in the rivers and streams west of the Mississippi River. Soon, however, felt replaced beaver fur in the styles of men's hats, and the fur trade died. (one who traps animals)

Most of my friends are serious hockey fans. They follow the teams and go to the games whenever they can. Me, I don't know anything about the game itself, and I don't follow any of the teams or their players. As a result, whenever we all get together and there happens to be a hockey game on television, while the others crowd around the set and hoot and holler, I'm pretty indifferent about it. (casual, unemotional, nonchalant)

I find that the best way for me to relocate something that I've lost is to simply retrace my steps. I carefully re-do everything I've done and go back over my exact movements. This usually works, and I wind up stumbling upon my lost item. (go back over)

The other day, while walking on the boardwalk and looking out at the ocean, I saw a graceful seagull gliding on the breeze. It dipped and dove, slanted and swooped, and then it flew just a

couple of feet from me and, extending its wings out into the breeze, hovered just over my head. It hung suspended there for a moment, then flew off. (to hang suspended)

Besides watching the seagulls as I walk the boardwalk, another thing I enjoy is watching the sun come up early in the morning. As the sun breaks over the horizon, it looks like a big orange ball. Then, as it slowly climbs into the sky, it changes from yellow to white. (the line where the earth and sky meet)

"There's something wrong with my television set," said the man to the G.E. repairman who was making a house call, tool box in hand. "There is an annoying horizontal line on the screen that runs from one end of it all the way to the other, dividing the picture in half. And, what's worse, the top half is wavy and the bottom half is snowy." (left-to-right)

I like reading about ghosts, unexplained occurrences, and unsolved mysteries. If it's odd, bizarre, weird, strange, or uncanny, I'm interested in it. In fact, my library at home is filled with books on such subjects. (strange, odd, unusual)

Because of a chip in the crystal of my watch, which happened when it fell off my night stand and I accidentally stepped on it, the little box where you can tell the date is blurred, since the chip is directly over this spot. (glass covering over the face of a watch)

Vocabulary Review (B)

When Mr. Aria went on vacation with Mildred Fleener, she thought they'd be staying in a luxury motel suite overlooking the beautiful seashore. Imagine her surprise, then, when Mr. Aria arranged for the two of them to stay in a lean-to that was propped up against a coconut tree. That Mr. Aria sure is thrifty. (a temporary shelter)

The other night I reached into the crack behind the seat cushion of my sofa, hoping that I might find some change down there. As I felt with my hands, my fingers closed around some unidentifiable thing. Since I couldn't see it, I wasn't sure what it was. It felt kind of mushy in the middle and crusty on the edges. Also, it felt like it had some hair on one end and the bottom of it was slimy. My curiosity got the better of me and I grabbed it and pulled it out. Would you believe it? It was half a bologna sandwich that I had made for myself for dinner one night, about a month before. I'd kind of wondered what happened to it. Mystery solved. (unknown, unable to be determined)

My great, great, grand Uncle Milton "Stinky" Aria was a legendary fur trapper in the Rocky Mountains in the 1800's. Only problem was, instead of beaver, he'd trap skunks. It seems he preferred wearing skunk-skin caps instead of coon-skin. Now you know how he got his nickname. (one who traps animals)

"It's not that I'm indifferent about your wanting to take me out on a date this weekend," said Mildred to her boyfriend, Mr. Aria, "and just because I don't get excited, it doesn't mean that I don't appreciate your offer. It's just that, well, going down to the corner laundromat to watch the

clothes tumbling in the jumbo dryers isn't my idea of a romantic evening." (casual, unemotional, nonchalant)

After Mr. Aria lost his billfold, he had to retrace his steps to find it. It wasn't too hard to locate, since it was the one that was bulging with two-for-one coupons from White Castle. (go back over)

"Your reason for not having your homework," said Mr. Aria to little Axelrod, "that it was vaporized by a homework-destroying alien from the planet Grog, who shot it with his laser-beam eyes while hovering six feet over your head in his space craft, I find a little hard to believe." (to hang suspended)

The storm clouds that were gathering on the eastern horizon told Mr. Aria and Mildred that they'd better pack up their tent and leave the campsite. Too bad, too, since Mr. Aria had gotten the site at a reasonable price, since it was on the side of a steep hill, and was directly downwind from the city sewerage treatment plant. (the line where the earth and sky meet)

When Oliver wore the brand new sweater his mom had given him for his birthday, the one with the wide horizontal stripes of yellow and brown across it, all the kids said he looked like a giant bumble-bee. (left-to-right)

"I'll tell you," said Mr. Aria to Mr. Hannis, as the two sat in the faculty room at Fords Middle School one chilly November morning, "Mildred seems to be able to read my mind! It's uncanny the way she seems to know what I'm thinking. I'm amazed by it, but she claims it's no big deal. She just tells me that the littler the mind, the easier it is to read." (strange, odd, unusual)

When the crystal on Mr. Aria's Mickey Mouse watch broke last week, he wrote a letter to Disney World to see if he could have it replaced. (glass covering over the face of a watch)

Vocabulary Test

I accidentally banged my wrist against the side of the door last week. As a result, there was a thin, hair-line crack that ran _____1_____ across the face of the _____2_____ on my watch. I didn't think that it mattered much, until a couple of days later when I was caught in a sudden rainstorm. Apparently, some moisture seeped into the crack, fogging up the inside of the watch and making the numbers on the face appear to be nothing but a large, _____3_____ blur.

James and Michael went on a camping trip into "Mystery Valley" last weekend. The reason it's called that is that it's supposed to be haunted by the ghost of an old _____4_____ who was killed by a grizzly bear while checking his traps one day long ago. Supposedly, the old man had his arm ripped off, and now, so the story goes, his spirit wanders aimlessly on foggy nights, looking for the lost arm. The boys weren't the type to believe in such fanciful tales, but, that very evening, a fog suddenly rolled in. Then, as the boys lay huddled beneath the _____5_____ that they had built for a shelter, they heard some _____6_____ noises from far off in the misty woods. They couldn't quite identify the sound at first, since it was a little too faint. But, as the sound drew nearer, they thought it sounded like the moan or wail of a wounded animal, with

some eerie gurgling sounds mixed in. This _____7_____ experience was too much for the boys, who were by then completely frightened and not too sure they doubted the existence of ghosts. Suddenly, they saw a strange, greenish light _____8_____ over them from just at the edge of the clearing. The next thing you know, a piercing cry of terror rang out in the night, and the unfortunate boys were never seen or heard from again!

The radar operator sat in the control tower of the airfield and scanned the _____9_____ for approaching aircraft. There wasn't a single object out there, and all seemed quiet. Then, off in the western sky, he thought he saw a pair of yellow-green lights _____10_____ there in mid-air. Switching on the radar screen, he studied the monitor. The screen of the monitor was bisected by a _____11_____ line, running from right to left. There, on the lower half of the screen, appeared some _____12_____ cluster of tiny lights, unlike anything he had ever seen before. It grew larger, as if it were rapidly approaching. The mass of lights moved across the screen, then seemed to almost stop in mid-flight and _____13_____ its movements, slowly back across the monitor. Then, as mysteriously as it had appeared, it was suddenly gone. To this day, he wonders what it was. Who knows?

When I was sick in bed with a stomach virus all last week, my friends and family couldn't do enough for me. People were dropping by with medication, coming over to keep me company, asking if there was anything they could do for me, and calling all the time to see how I was feeling. These people meant well, but I was kind of _____14_____ through it all, not seeming to care that they were there. It's not that I don't appreciate their concern for me, it's just that I can't stand people _____15_____ over me all the time when I don't feel well.

When Troy won the Student-of-the-Month award for January, although he outwardly seemed _____16_____ when the principal called his name over the loudspeaker during homeroom that morning, inside he was so excited he wanted to jump out of his seat.

Eric and Michelle went down to Sandy Hook Bay in the late afternoon to watch the sunset. The sky had beautiful orange and pink streaks in it as the sun set over the bay. It was a lovely autumn day, and as the sun slowly dipped beneath the _____17_____, Eric squeezed Michelle's hand and was filled with joy. Not so, Michelle. She seemed to view the whole thing with an odd _____18_____, and Eric was puzzled. Later, he learned what had caused her to seem so strangely nonchalant. Apparently, her mind wasn't on the beautiful setting at all. She had had a bad day at work, and was busy _____19_____ in her mind the unfortunate events of the day.

"My mom always seems to know when I'm not telling the truth," said Billy to his best friend Eric, as the two walked home from school one afternoon. "I can fool my dad without too much difficulty, but my mom, no way. She's just got this _____20_____ ability to know when I'm telling a lie."

"Yeah, mine too," added Eric with a sigh, "It must be some special power that all mothers have, I guess."

Answers

1. horizontally
2. crystal
3. unidentifiable
4. trapper
5. lean-to
6. unidentifiable
7. uncanny
8. hovering
9. horizon
10. hover(ing)
11. horizontal
12. unidentifiable
13. retrace
14. indifferent
15. hovering
16. indifferent
17. horizon
18. indifference
19. retracing
20. uncanny

Vocabulary Review (A)

Jerry was unhappy in his job. He was a quality-control supervisor at the Coca-Cola bottling plant, and although his was a vital position and he was well paid, all he did all day long was watch bottles pass by on a conveyor belt. All day. To make matters worse, the speed with which they passed by him never varied. Sixteen bottles, every thirty seconds, no more, no less. The monotony of it was driving him nuts. Once he began seeing these slowly moving bottles in his dreams, he knew it was time to change jobs. (boredom caused by sameness or repitition)

In the days of the great whaling ships, the job of the ship's lookout was to sit in the crow's nest, high atop the main mast, above the sails and the rigging of the ship. From this lofty perch he would scan the horizon in search of whales. This job usually went th the crewman who had the sharpest eyesight, for it meant watching the vast waters, waiting for one of the huge fish to breach the surface of the ocean. (To look over or check)

William worked as a landscaper, and put in long hours working on people's lawns. He would trim hedges, cut grass, plant shrubbery, and rake leaves. He enjoyed working in the outdoors. Nothing made him happier that to be in the fresh air and sunshine. As a result of this, the back of his neck, his face, his arms, and any other part of his body that was constantly exposed to the sun, had long ago turned a deep, dark brown. (uncovered, unprotected, revealed)

From the edge of the river, one cold night in early fall, a fog began to roll in. As the misty fog became heavier, it moved slowly up the riverbank towards the streets of the town. The fog

resembled a thick, white cloud as it slowly moved in. Soon, the entire town was enveloped in a smoky white mist. (surrounded, covered, enclosed)

It has been said that animals display a sixth sense or intuition when some natural disaster is about to occur. I have heard of pets, for example, that, just before an earthquake is about to hit, begin acting strangely. I have first-hand knowledge of just such an instance. A woman I know, who lives in Oregon not too far from Mt. Hood, noticed her cat acting in an odd manner one evening. The cat, which had been curled and asleep in a big easy chair in the living room, suddenly woke, bolted under the piano, and would not come out. Moments later, the area felt the first tremors of a minor earthquake. (a feeling or knowledge that comes from within)

When I lived in Oregon I saw lots of strange things. One of the oddest is the town of Woodburn, which lies south of Portland in the Willamette River Valley. This is a town whose population is virtually 100% Russian. It seems that years ago some Russian immigrants came to this country, and, of all the places they could have found, where did they settle? In the middle of the Oregon logging country. So, over the years, as more Russians came to this country, they were drawn to the place where they felt the most at home, Woodburn. Eventually they established a little Russian community in the forest. The Russian language is taught in the schools there, there's a big Russian church in the center of town, Russian restaurants line the streets, and they even publish a Russian newspaper. So now there's this little Russian town, isolated in the middle of the great American Northwest. (separate, alone, set apart)

I'll never forget the ending of the Super Bowl a couple of years ago. The Rams were leading the Titans by a touchdown with time running out. The Titans were driving and, on the game's final play, the quarterback threw the ball to his wide receiver, who looked for a moment like he would score the tying touchdown, but was tackled a scant 12 inches from the goal line. What an exciting finish. (mere or measly, just barely)

When Mr. Aria told us the story of the fur-trapper Hugh Glass, I was amazed. How could somebody be mauled by a grizzly bear, abandoned in hostile Indian country without a knife, gun, or food, crawl back to civilization and find medical help, then walk BACK out west in search of the men who left him? The whole drama is something well beyond my imagination.

Vocabulary Review (B)

"I think Mr. Aria and I are getting into a rut," said Mildred Fleener to her close friend Flo Finster. "We do the same thing every Saturday night, with no change in the routine. Here's our typical Saturday night: first, he shows me his bottle cap collection for about an hour, then we sit on the couch in the living room and flip through his autograph book of famous harmonica repairmen. After that, we watch the weather channel on television, and finally, he opens up his sock drawer and shows me any new socks he may have bought during the week. And then I go home."

"That's what you do every Saturday night?" asked Flo in disbelief.

"Yep, EVERY Saturday. Talk about boring. The monotony of it is driving me nuts." (boredom caused by sameness or repitition)

Before deciding on a restaurant to take Mildred on those rare occasions when he takes her out to eat, Mr. Aria will usually scan the menu, trying to get a sense of the general price of the items offered. A restaurant whose dinners range around five dollars and above, say, is completely out of the question. This is why they'll usually wind up going to Quick Check for a couple of tuna fish sandwiches, especially if Mr. Aria has a two-for-one coupon. (to look over or check)

When one of his students confronted Mr. Aria with proof that the name Mildred Fleener does not belong to a real person, and is in fact the name of a fictional character from a '70's sit-com, he was exposed as a fake, a phony, and a fraud. Actually, none of his students was really surprised, since they couldn't imagine how any woman could ever stand to be with him. (uncovered, unprotected, revealed)

Had Peabody known that he had given his entire oral report, in front of Mr. Aria's class, with his fly open, he'd have been enveloped in a nervous perspiration, since he sweats tremendously at the slightest embarrassment. As it was, he was not aware of it at the time, although the entire class was, and they, fortunately, never let him forget it. (surrounded, covered, enclosed)

"Call it a sixth sense, call it intuition, or call it just plain instinct," said Mildred to her sister Clara, "but I know when Mr. Aria is about to call. In fact, something inside me says that he will call within the next few moments." Sure enough, in that next instant the phone rang. It was indeed Mr. Aria, calling to see if she needed a slightly rain-damaged umbrella stand that he had seen on top of a pile of rubbish at the side of the road. He's very thoughtful like that. (a feeling or knowledge that comes from within)

Earl "Stinky" Alexander could never understand why he was always isolated on the school bus going to and from school. Could it possibly have been the fact that he lived on a diet of raw onions, sardines, garlic, and Limburgher cheese? Let's just say that his breath could peel paint. (separate, alone, set apart)

"I can't understand why Mildred got upset with me," said a confused Mr. Aria to Mr. Hannis, as the two sat sipping coffee one morning in the faculty room at Fords Middle School. "I mean, it's not like I asked her to pay for the WHOLE bill at White Castle when we went out to dinner last night. I had almost enough to cover it. The bill came to three dollars and sixty-nine cents, and I had a dollar fifty-nine on me. I mean, come on, I was only short a scant ten cents. So what's the big deal if I ask her to kick in a dime? And besides, if she didn't order the onion rings, I'd have had enough to cover it." (mere or measly, barely)

Luckily for everyone in the elevator that fateful day in the administration building, our hero, Mr. Aria, was there to save the day when it became stuck between floors. The entire drama was quite thrilling, frankly, and thanks to Mr. Aria's heroics, ended happily for everyone involved, especially the ladies who, when Mr. Aria ripped off his shirt before hoisting himself up through

the emergency trap-door in the ceiling, were able to catch a fleeting glimpse of his buff chest. (excitement, suspense, or thrill)

Vocabulary Test

Before I took the math exam, I briefly _____1_____ my notes on fractions. I guess I didn't look closely enough, for although I only missed the cut-off by a _____2_____ three points, I failed to qualify for honors algebra next year.

Marla's _____3_____ told her that her boyfriend Jack, who swore his faithfulness to her, was seeing someone else behind her back. So, she confronted him on the matter. She could tell right away that he was uncomfortable, because he was _____4_____ in perspiration, and he always sweats a lot when he's nervous about something. He denied any wrongdoing, and swore once again that he loved only her. Marla held true to her instincts, however, and very soon afterward they were proven to be accurate, for a _____5_____ two days later she ran into Jack and his secretary Sheila, having coffee together at a cozy little sidewalk café, and Jack's unfaithfulness was _____6_____.

Scientists and doctors who are working on a cure for the AIDS virus have been attempting to _____7_____ the cell that attacks the immune system. If they can single it out and study it, they feel that perhaps they can produce an effective vaccine.

Allan had recently moved into the community from another state. He had been in his senior year in high school when his parents had to move. He was, in fact, a _____8_____ three months away from graduation. He wasn't happy about the move. He'd like to have stayed where he was, with all the friends he'd grown up with. Unfortunately, however, his dad's company transferred him out of state, and the family had to go along. Leaving his friends behind was difficult enough, but now he was _____9_____ to a whole new crowd of kids, most of whom were total strangers to him. As a result, he felt socially _____10_____. That all changed when he met Melissa, a classmate who, like Allan, was new in school. She was very active in the school's _____11_____ club, and had in fact been given the leading role in the school's production of "My Fair Lady" the previous fall. She befriended him and convinced him to try out for the lead role in the spring play, "Saturday Night Fever," which he did. Although he didn't receive the part, he did get a smaller role and, more importantly, acquired a whole new group of friends.

My little sister is the biggest _____12_____ queen going. I swear to God she can't get through the morning without having a major crisis or two. And boy, does she ever over-act when she wants my parents' attention. Why, just the other day, she fell out of her swing in the backyard and scraped her knee. Big deal, right? Well, my sister runs inside the house crying her eyes out, right to my mom, who gives her a big ice cream cone so she'll feel better. Then, my sister limps around the house all day long, expecting sympathy from everyone, until my dad comes home and says that we're all going roller skating, only she can't come because she hurt her knee. So what do you think happens? She miraculously gets better and stops limping. You know something, one of these days she's going to slip up and she'll be _____13_____ as a phony. Until then, though, she's got my mom and dad pretty well fooled. But not me.

Jennifer felt lonesome and friendless. In addition, she had a strong conviction that her co-workers at the phone company didn't like her. As a result, whenever she had occasion to get together with any of her co-workers, like during her lunch hour or at break time, or sometimes after work, and they ignored her, she was _____14_____ to tremendous feelings of _____15_____.

Those who attempt to climb Mt. Everest brave many dangers. In addition to the sheer physical demands of scaling the great granite cliffs, they must face _____16_____ to below-freezing temperatures, harsh winds, and dangerously low oxygen levels in the air, especially as they reach the highest altitudes.

Elliott hated his job as a cashier at the local grocery store. To begin with, they always stuck him out on the furthest register from the door, so he felt _____17_____ out there, away from everyone else. As if that weren't bad enough, he was usually _____18_____ to some very cranky customers, who'd give him an argument about the expiration date on their coupons, or insist that the item they'd selected was still on sale, even though the sale ended the week before. Worst of all, though, was the fact that the job was just plain boring. All he did was _____19_____ grocery items all day long "beep…beep…beep…" The _____20_____ of it was driving him crazy.

Answers

1. scanned
2. scant
3. intuition
4. enveloped
5. scant
6. exposed
7. isolate
8. scant
9. exposed
10. isolated
11. drama
12. drama
13. exposed
14. exposed
15. isolation
16. exposure
17. isolated
18. exposed
19. scan
20. monotony

Vocabulary Review (A)

Marcus Wilson was one of the most admired, respected, and well-liked members of the town. He owned and operated Wilson's Pharmacy, on the corner of Main Street and Broad in the center of town, for over 40 years. He opened his business as soon as he had graduated from pharmacist's college, and it grew along with the community. The kids in town liked him especially, since he would sometimes dispense free chocolate milk shakes from the pharmacy soda fountain on Sundays. When he finally retired and moved away, everyone felt that they had truly lost an upstanding member of the community. (admired, respected, honorable)

Of all of her possessions, the thing that Sandra cherishes the most is a pink and blue afghan that her grandmother knitted for her when she was a little girl. She'd snuggle up with it in bed, teddy bear clutched close to her, when she was a child. As a teen, she proudly kept it folded neatly at the bottom of her bed. She even took it off with her to college, where it kept her warm on many a chilly night in the dorm. Now, as a grown woman with a little girl of her own, she'll sometimes place it gently over her sleeping child, knowing that the love in every stitch keeps her especially warm. (a small, crocheted blanket)

Al Capone, a.k.a. "Scarface," was a notorious gangster who terrorized Chicago during the 1920's. He ran a mob of murdering thugs who supplied illegal liquor to the "speakeasies'" or illegal drinking clubs, in the city. Through this and other illegal activities he eventually became a millionaire, who often boasted that he owned all the politicians and police in the city. He was eventually sent to jail for non-payment of income tax, and the old "Scarface," whose nickname came from a knife wound suffered during a bar-room fight many years before, died in prison. (also known as)

In order for James to graduate from college, he had to complete one more three-credit class. He looked over the requirements for his degree major, and saw that the still needed three credits in health. Perfect. Especially since he didn't have to get an A in the class, just as long as he didn't fail. So, he signed up for "Introduction to Health," knowing he only needed to do passably in the class, and wound up getting an A. (average, good enough)

The Yankees suffered a heartbreaking loss in the World Series. After Alfonso Soriano had hit a homerun in the 8th inning to put the Yankees up one, all they had to do was shut down the Diamondbacks in the bottom of the 9th inning to win it. They had their ace pitcher, Mariano Rivera, on the mound with a runner on first base. The batter tried a sacrifice bunt back to the pitcher. Rivera pounced off the mound, grabbed the ball, and was in position to throw the runner out at second base. Unfortunately, he botched the play and threw the ball past the second baseman into center field for an error. Next thing you know, the Diamondbacks, given a reprieve, strung together a couple of hits to win the game, and the series. (to ruin or mess up)

My Uncle Leo is always going to garage sales, flea markets, and rummage sales to buy things. He's always felt that it's foolish to go to a mall, say, and pay top prices for merchandise such as furniture, when you can pick up some perfectly good used pieces for a fraction of the cost. You should see his apartment. The entire place is furnished with used furniture that he's picked up in

his travels. Some people call him cheap. I think he's sensible. (a market of used merchandise, usually to raise money for charity)

I'm a fan of old-time television. I especially like The Honeymooners, a situation comedy from the '50's. The main character was a bus driver named Ralph Kramden, played by Jackie Gleason, and his sidekick was the goofy upstairs neighbor, Ed Norton. To me, the show was absolutely hilarious. On occasion I'll catch a re-run on the Nostalgia Channel, and even though I've seen each episode dozens of times and know every punch line by heart, I'll still laugh right out loud. (extremely funny)

Paul had major problems with his co-worker, Sid. To begin with, Sid seemed to finish his work in the office much earlier than Paul did, and although Paul had never really seen the quality of Sid's work, he felt sure that it certainly was not as good as his. How could it be? What further annoyed him was that, in the last hour or so of the workday while Paul was busy finishing up reports for the office manager, Sid was free to chat with Sally, the attractive computer progammer who worked in the electronics division of the office. This angered Paul especially, since he had once asked Sally out on a date and she refused. However, instead of confronting Sid with what was bothering him, Paul did the gutless thing and told the office manager that Sid was slacking off and doing no work at the end of the day. The office manager told Paul to mind his own business. (cowardly, timid, afraid)

Vocabulary Review (B)

It was generally believed by people in the town that Bosworth W. Poindexter, heir the fabulous Peek Freens fortune, was a well-respected gentleman and a fine, upstanding member of the community. How shocked they were, then, when news broke out of the ugly incident that occurred at the Silver Oaks Social Club, in which the honorable Mr. Poindexter, or "Boz," as his close friends call him, was involved. It seems violence erupted after Mr. Poindexter was beaten in the men's final round of the tiddly-winks tournament. He stamped his feet really hard, held his breath until he turned blue, and finally threatened to take his tiddly-winks and go home, which is exactly what he did. See that? You never know about some people. (admired, respected, honorable)

Mr. Aria, thoughtful, sensitive, and caring man that he is, decided to knit an afghan for his sweetheart, Mildred Fleener. No special occasion—that's just the kind of guy he is. Well, unfortunately, he somehow managed to knit one of his sweaty gym socks into it. Don't ask him how he did it. He didn't even notice it, since the main color of the afghan was a kind of brownish-yellow, same as the dirty sock. Well, he lovingly presented Mildred her gift. At first she was overjoyed, but she returned it two days later. It seemed that whenever she held it close to her face, her eyes would water. Also, she claimed that while most of it was soft to the touch, a small part was crusty and hard, and scratched her skin. Mr. Aria was a little disappointed when she gave it back to him, but he didn't say anything, and soon got over it. That's another one of his good qualities. He doesn't let things bother him. (a small, crocheted blanket)

Mr. Aria, a.k.a. "Twinlketoes," received his nickname during the days long ago when he would chaperon the dances at Fords Middle School. He'd be there, just trying to mind his own business

and stay out of the way, when sure enough, some female faculty member would be unable to resist dragging him out onto the dance floor, where he would light up the gymnasium with his awesome, spectacular moves, many of which hadn't even been invented yet. Those days, sadly, are gone. Ever since he stepped on Mildred Fleener's foot and broke two of her toes while boogieing down at Club 64 several months back, he put the old magic dancing shoes away for good. Too bad, too, since he was really quite the dancer. Just ask any of the female teachers who were fortunate enough to be dazzled on the dance floor by old "Twink" Aria. (also known as)

Mort's goal was to do passably on Mr. Aria's killer vocabulary test. Imagine his surprise, then, when he received an F on it. It seems that Mort, like an idiot, studied the wrong words! He had mistakenly taken home the words for his English test that he'd be taking the following Wednesday. The story does have a happy ending, however. Mr. Aria was able to pound the F into the poor student's paper with a heavy hand. He actually broke the point of his red pencil in doing so. Nothing makes him happier. (average, good enough)

Mildred Fleener wanted to surprise Mr. Aria by baking him a cake on his birthday. Unfortunately, however, she somehow botched things up when trying to follow the recipe instructions on the back of the box of cake mix. Whether she put in the wrong ingredients or left it in the oven too long, nobody's quite sure. One thing's certain, however, the result was a disaster. It looked like a mushy flat tire with a hard, lumpy thing in the middle. The knife broke when she tried to cut it, and it tasted like sawdust. Mr. Aria, not one to disappoint, ate a large piece, washed it down with some bee...I mean ginger ale, and went home with a belly-ache, which he had, incidentally, for two weeks. (to ruin or mess up)

Mr. Aria follows two basic rules when shopping for used clothing at rummage sales. First, when selecting shoes, one must be certain that the odor-eaters can be scraped out. Second, and perhaps more importantly, always be on the alert for old-man dribble on flannel shirts. You see old men dribble a lot. Consequently, one will often find a hard, crusty line of dried drool running down the shirt front which, if one is not careful, may be overlooked since it often blends in with the pattern of the shirt. Mr. Aria is an old pro at purchasing used garments, however, so he rarely falls victim to dried dribble. (a market of used merchandise, usually to raise money for charity)

Some of his students felt that the story of Mr. Aria walking all over town in his brother-in-law's boxer shorts, mistakenly thinking that they were some new-style, lightweight summer wear, was pretty hilarious . You could tell by their roaring laughter. Actually, it was quite embarrassing. (extremely funny)

Mr. Aria, as a little boy, was challenged by the freckle-faced bully at the swim club, Billy Thompson, to jump off the high dive. When Mr. Aria, thinking safety first, initially refused, Billy taunted him by calling him yellow-belly, gutless, and scaredy-pants. That's all our adorable hero had to hear. Nobody challenges Mr. Aria like that and gets away with it! In a flash, he was up the ladder and standing, poised on the edge of the board, high above the gasping onlookers below, ready to execute his first-ever high dive. On this day was born the famous gravity-defying dive. The rest, as they say, is history. (cowardly, timid, afraid)

Vocabulary Test

Fred Merkle, _____1_____ "Bonehead," was an infielder who played for the old New York Giants at the beginning of the last century. The reason he was called "Bonehead" is that he _____2_____ a play in a late-season game against the Chicago Cubs that cost the Giants the pennant. It seems Merkle forgot to touch second base on a game winning hit in a Giants-Cubs game. Since the umpires couldn't decide what to do, they declared the game a tie, to be made up at the end of the season only if it was necessary to decide the pennant. Well, sure enough, the Cubs and the Giants finished in a tie in the National League, and had to face each other in a one-game playoff to decide the pennant. Unfortunately for the Giants, and Merkle, the Cubs won.

"How did you do at the _____3_____ that was being held in the parking lot of the elementary school?" Warren asked his best friend, Claude.

"Pretty well, considering the way the day started," replied Claude.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it's a wonder I made it there at all, because while I was trying to follow directions to the school, I _____4_____ things up pretty badly and almost got lost. Luckily there were some street signs to follow, so I got there okay."

"Did you pick up any good stuff?" asked Warren.

"As a matter of fact, I did," answered Claude. "I got a very nice, hand-knitted _____5_____ that will go perfectly on the back of my living room sofa. I can also use it as an extra blanket on cold nights. Two bucks."

"No kidding? Very good."

"And not only that, but I picked up a video-cassette of that _____6_____ comedy, 'Kung Pow: Enter the Fist' for a buck and a half."

"Not bad," replied Warren. "I didn't even know it was out on video yet."

Adam realized that if he hadn't _____7_____ things up on the last part of Mr. Taylor's killer math exam, the part on fractions, he'd have done _____8_____ on it.

One of the most _____9_____ movies I ever saw, I mean total non-stop laughter, was called "The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight," which was all about this collection of goof-ball gangsters and their _____10_____ attempts to rob banks.

Whenever Ed thought about his childhood, he remembered the people who lived in the old neighborhood. There was old Mrs. McIntyre, the retired schoolteacher. She'd run the church _____11_____ every month, where they sold used furniture and old clothes, to help raise money for poor families in town. She was one of the most admired and respected people in the community, a real _____12_____ lady. Then there was Harold Weems, _____13_____ "the _____14_____ one," who was scared of his own shadow. Why, he was even afraid of the crossing guard down by the schoolyard, friendly officer Kelley, who wouldn't harm a fly. The person he remembers most, though, was his best friend Herman Greene, who told the most _____15_____ jokes anybody ever heard. Old Herman grew up to be a stand-up comic, to nobody's surprise.

Amy stopped at a _____16_____ on her way home from work last Saturday, since she thought that she'd pick up a few used books to read. She came up empty on the books, but she did pick up several bundles of yarn, at half price, thinking to knit herself a sweater. Instead, she decided to knit a small _____17_____ for the bottom of her bed, since the one she had was full of cat hairs from her cat, Fluffy. Well, wouldn't you know, she somehow _____18_____ things up pretty badly while knitting it, and it wound up looking like a small, lopsided parachute.

It was apparent to Art when he tasted his wife's spinach casserole, that she had evidently _____19_____ the recipe somehow, because it tasted like stale cough medicine. Art was too _____20_____ to let her know, though, since he knew that if he said something critical about the casserole to her, it would have ended up in his lap.

Answers

1. a.k.a.
2. botched
3. rummage sale
4. botched
5. afghan
6. hilarious
7. botched
8. passably
9. hilarious
10. botched
11. rummage sale(s)
12. upstanding
13. a.k.a.
14. gutless
15. hilarious
16. rummage sale
17. afghan
18. botched
19. botched
20. gutless